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SCHOLARSHIP WINNER FROM UM RETURNS FROM ITALY

By Cary E. Holmquist
UM University Relations

MISSOULA--

The problem with returning from Italy to Montana, according to University of Montana senior Danette Wollersheim, is finding a way back to Italy again for more study and travel.

Getting there the first time wasn't very easy--she had to compete against hundreds of other students of Italian background at U. S. universities for 10 scholarships from "Attenzione," an Italian-American magazine published in New York City.

Wollersheim, who majors in elementary education and minors in Italian at UM, was chosen on the basis of her college grade transcript, letters of recommendation and an essay on why she wanted to study in Italy.

The scholarship paid for Wollersheim's tuition, board, room and travel to the University of Siena in Siena, near Florence. For two months there this summer, Wollersheim studied Italian art, architecture, music and literature in a special program designed for the scholarship students from America.

"It was great experience to speak and learn more of the Italian language," Wollersheim said. "Though most of the jokes went over my head, when I got my first one everyone was so pleased."

She added that she had the opportunity to feel "like one of the Italians, not like just any American tourist passing through."

(over)

SCHOLARSHIP WINNER FROM UN RETURNS--add one

All the classes were taught in Italian by one of four professors in the program, Wollersheim said, though there were not Italian language classes. "I was grateful for the good preparation Dr. (Domenico) Ortisi in the UM Italian program gave me," she commented, "otherwise I would have been very lost."

The faculty members took the students to nearby churches and museums for field studies of art architecture and history in addition to classroom lectures.

Wollersheim said she will pass on the knowledge of the Italian language and culture to her classes when she becomes an elementary teacher. "I think it's important for American children to learn about other people and cultures," she said, "in that way they will fear less and be more open to others."

While studying in Italy, Wollersheim lived in a 13th century monastery about 10 kilometers from Siena that had been converted for use by modern-day students. Her accommodations came complete with a cooking and housekeeping staff who regarded her as one of their children. "It was too hard for them to say 'Danette,'" she reflected, "so they called me Dana."

After finishing the academic program, Wollersheim traveled in the Florence area and lived with a 92-year-old aunt in Lucca, northeast of Florence.

"I found out that it's a national offense to refuse food--even if I'd just eaten somewhere else," Wollersheim remarked. She said that in her travels she met many people who would invite her to their homes for dinner and to stay around for various festivals.

"The Italian people are really great," she commented. "It seems to be true that they are stereotypically inefficient and all that, but that's because they are concerned with the day-to-day things--like getting enough to eat, having a good day, learning--and not big things like the government collapsing."

(more)

SCHOLARSHIP WINNER FROM UM RETURNS--add two

She explained that with their long history of "big events," the Italians feel that recent social calamities don't personally matter much.

However, she added that most Italians take great pride in their city and the surrounding countryside and they want visitors to feel good while there. In Siena, she said, everyone gets involved with the summer festival horseraces, called "the Paoli," through the town and each of the 17 sections of the city has its favorites in the competition.

But four months in Italy wasn't enough for Wollersheim. She said she is anxious to find a way back to study and travel more and is contemplating enrolling in a foreign university there or joining an exchange program.

Wollersheim, daughter of Janet Wollersheim, Missoula, is a 1978 graduate of Sentinel High School. She is the granddaughter of Nello and Inez Puccinelli of Anaconda.

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